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ABSTRACT

Public relations has been caught up in the drive to internationalize business. Organizations are now dealing with global constituencies on a more frequent basis, which increases the demand for international public relations. One concern raised by this development is whether or not theory and research are keeping pace with the international needs of the practitioners. This paper examines the published public relations research articles to assess how well or poorly theory and research have kept up with the demands for internationalization. The survey of public relations articles demonstrates a very slow pace for the internationalizing of public relations research. The paper concludes with a discussion of three critical areas: the failure to internationalize, the need for integrative frameworks, and possible ways to examine interactions. (Contains 3 notes, 18 references, and 4 tables of data.) (Author/RS)

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Progress in Research and Theory:
Eleven Years of International Public Relations Articles

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Abstract

Public relations has been caught up in the drive to internationalize business. Organizations are now dealing with global constituencies on a more frequent basis. In other words, there is an increased demand for international public relations. One concern raised by this development is whether or not theory and research are keeping pace with the international needs of the practitioners. This paper examines the published public relations research articles to assess how well or poorly theory and research have kept up with the demands for internationalization.

Progress in Research and Theory:
Eleven Years of International Public Relations Articles

In today's world, every business is international in some respect. The global market is quite accessible and a factor in the operation of almost any company. As illustrated in Table 1, direct foreign investment in the U.S. and by U.S. firms overseas keeps increasing. Coupled with improved communication technology, the growth of international business provides for an increasing number of cross-cultural encounters. A segment of these encounters are the interactions between an organization and publics from different cultures and countries which now populate its environment. The end result has been the rapid growth of international or cross-cultural public relations (Epley, 1992; Grunig, 1992).[1] However, public relations can not play its international role effectively unless theory and research keep pace with the demands of the practice.

Historically, the United States has been a leader in public relations theory and research. Given the current expansion of international public relations, the United States might be expected to take a leadership role in articulating international perspectives for public relations. The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which public relations research is meeting the demands created by internationalization. One way to determine if this challenge is being met is to examine the public relations research journals in order to determine what has been written to help practitioners cope with the demands of international public

relations. An examination of the journals will reveal the extent to which theories, models, and research about the international aspects of public relations are being developed.

Method

International public relations is a rather vast domain. This domain includes communication between countries, between cultures, and the interaction of employees from different cultures within the same organization. In 1983, Nancy Adler wrestled with a similar question about cross-cultural management research. The examination of international public relations research will follow Adler's (1983) model.

Journals Examined

The journals used in this study were selected if they met two criteria. First, the journal had publish public relations-related articles on a regular basis. Second, the journal had to be research-oriented.[2] Three journals met the two criteria: Journal of Public Relations Research, Public Relations Review, and Journalism Quarterly. All articles in the Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review were included in the study since all of the articles focus on public relations. The research in brief segments of Public Relations Review were counted as articles. The article served as the unit of analysis.

Only public relations-oriented articles from Journalism Quarterly were included. The public relations-oriented articles were located by (1) examining the yearly index under the heading of public relations and (2) reviewing the table of contents for each

issue.[3] The journals were examined for the time period between 1983 to 1993. The Journal of Public Relations Research did not begin publication until 1989 and for its first three years was an annual titled Public Relations Research Annual.

Coding

The coding categories were derived from Adler (1983). Each article was coded for two factors: international and culture dimensions. An article was coded as "international" if it included a country or area other than the United States. An article mentioning only the United States was coded as "domestic." An article was coded as "cultural" if it include culture as a variable or recognized culture as a possible variable in future studies. Possible variable refers to the articulation of frameworks which can be used for future international comparisons where culture is one of the variables in the comparative framework. Wilson's (1990) matrix approach to issues management is an example of a comparative framework which includes culture as a variable. An article not mentioning culture was coded as "non-cultural."

Articles which were both international and cultural were given the additional label of "cross-cultural." The cross-cultural articles were coded further into one of three categories: "unicultural," "comparative," and "interactive." Unicultural articles examined public relations in one country other than the United States. For example, a case study of publicity in Mexico would be unicultural. Comparative articles provide a comparison between public relations practices in two or more countries. A

comparison of media relations in Ireland and Japan would be an example of a comparison article.

Interactive articles examine interactions between organizational members from two or more cultures and/or interactions between an organization's public relations messages and publics in another culture. The interaction can be face-to-face (direct contact) or through the media. International public relations has the possibility of both types of interaction. The globalization of public relations has led to the creation of international public relations networks. Practitioners from different cultures work together so that public relations efforts can be localized for specific countries. Such networks create multi-cultural work teams since the network members must coordinate their overall plans (Epley, 1992). Public relations messages frequently use the media leading to mediated interactions with foreign publics. An examination of the impact of a German company's public relations messages on publics in Columbia would be an example of an intercultural article.

Results

Table 2 reveals that of the 460 public relations articles published between 1983 and 1993, 38 (8.3%) were international, 25 (5.9%) were cultural, and 21 (4.6%) were cross-cultural. Of the cross-cultural articles, 8 (1.7%) were unicultural, 12 (2.6%) were comparative, and 1 (.2%) was interactive. The vast majority of public relations research was neither international nor cultural.

A closer examination of the international, cultural, and cross-cultural articles is warranted. Table 3 provides a summary of the articles. Of the international articles, 55.3% were cultural while only 44.7% were only geographically international with no reference to culture. Of the cultural articles, 84% were also international while only 16% discussed culture in the abstract with no grounding in a specific country or area of the world. Of the cross-cultural article, 57.1% were comparative, 38.1% were unicultural, and 4.8% were interaction.

Table 4 summarizes the public relations research by year by providing the total number of articles published per year and percentage of those articles which were international, cultural, or cross-cultural. The greatest percentage of international public relations research appeared in 1992. This was to be expected since the Public Relations Review ran its special issue on international public relations in that year.

Discussion

The survey of the public relations articles demonstrates a very slow pace for the internationalizing of public relations research. The vast majority of the published articles (over 90%) make no reference to culture or to countries other than the United States. Over the eleven-year time period, there appears to be no clear trend toward increasing the percent of international, cultural, or cross-cultural articles. Except for the high level of

productivity in 1992, there is no strong evidence to support the claim that public relations articles are becoming more internationalized.

A closer examination of the cross-cultural articles reveals the nature of this research. Comparative research comprises 57.1% of the cross-cultural studies. This is a positive sign. Comparative studies identify the similarities and differences which exist in how public relations is practiced in different countries. Such knowledge is useful in understanding how public relations practices might be modified when moving from one country to another (Coombs, Holladay, Hasenauer & Signitzer, 1994).

Still, 38.1% of the cross-cultural studies remain unicultural. The problem with unicultural studies is the difficultly in making comparisons when the case studies lack a common research focus. You cannot compare the results of two case studies if they examine different variables (Coombs, et al., 1994). Case studies tend to produce fragmented rather than cumulative knowledge. However, the knowledge can be cumulative from the case studies if the different studies use the same theories and variables for the examination of those variables. The analysis of similar theories and variables permits the research to be compared. Theory can be built from case studies if some unifying theory is used to guide each case study (Yin, 1984). Currently, the unicultural public relations research lacks a set of unifying variables resulting in disconnected knowledge about international public relations practices.

Unfortunately for international public relations, only 1 study has used an interactive approach. We know virtually nothing about how culture affects the impact of public relations messages sent between cultures or how multi-cultural public relations teams function. Both are important concerns given the use of public relations in multiple cultures and the growth of international public relations networks to localize public relations messages (Epley, 1992).

Public relations messages do cross cultural boundaries. It is to the advantage of public relations practitioners to understand how culture shapes the interpretation of messages. Such knowledge allows practitioners to crete more effective messages for multi-cultural publics.

As public relations internationalizes, more companies will use the international networks. When the international networks are used, work teams will combine various cultures. It would benefit public relations manager to know what to expect from these mixtures and how best to facilitate these multi-cultural work teams.

Future Directions

The survey of published public relations research raises a number of concerns which warrant further consideration. Three critical questions demand attention: (1) the failure to internationalize, (2) the need for integrative frameworks, and (3) possible ways to examine interactions.

Paramount among the concerns is the lag in internationalizing public relations research and theory. This does not mean researchers should forsake domestic (U.S) research and turn all eyes abroad. Public relations theory would suffer if this were done. Rather, researchers need to consider how culture might affect their results and/or fit into their research programs. For instance, culture fits nicely into the encroachment research line. Cultural factors, such as Hofstede's (1993) five cultural dimensions, could be examined as variables which shape managerial role aspiration or how practitioners come to conceptualize complexity (Lauzen, 1992; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). Where possible, culture should be identified as a variable which needs to be factored into the equation and tested in future research. Botan's (1993) discussion of image and ethics illustrates how culture can be factored in as a variable when planning research. Culture does affect communication, making it an important variable in the execution of public relations (Culbertson, Jeffers, Stone, & Terrell, 1993).

A second concern is the need for comparative information about the practice of public relations. If public relations practices vary from country to country, the field benefits from understanding how it varies. This knowledge helps practitioners from a different culture are to adapt to the new culture. The examination of public relations in each country must be additive and not isolated from one another. The research should build a coherent body of knowledge rather than scattered insights into unrelated factors.

Even unicultural studies can contribute if consistent frameworks (including measures) are used in the case studies. When the same framework is used in different studies, the results for each study can be compared to one another in a meaningful fashion. Examples of existing frameworks are Botan's (1992) public relations matrix, Wilson's (1990) matrix approach to issues management, and Sriramesh's (1992) use of Hofstede's (1980) power dimension and nation's level of activism.

Consistent use of the comparative frameworks and measures could create a valuable body of knowledge for international public relations. The comparative frameworks build a common information base for comparing public relations activities between countries. Each study, even if it is unicultural, might contribute information useful in explaining how public relations practices in different countries are different or similar.

The final concern is the failure to use an interactive approach to the cross-cultural studies. Precious little, if anything, is known about multi-cultural public relations teams and how culture affects the creation and reception of public relations messages. Interactive information is essential because it affects the production and the reception of public relations messages. However, other areas of study have researched similar concepts and can be used to guide public relations research into these two areas of interactive public relations research.

Intercultural research in management and communication have examined multi-cultural work teams (eg., Adler, 1991; Victor,

1992). Lessons from management and communication provide insights into what public relations researchers can expect when they examine multi-cultural work teams. A thorough review of the intercultural management and communication literatures should provide an agenda for conducting research which examines the international public relations networks.

International advertising research has examined how culture shapes the creation and reception of public messages (eg., de Mooij & Keegan, 1991; Kaynak, 1989).). Public relations researchers can learn from these works. The key is to understand how messages are affected when transmitted between cultures. Public relations practitioners must appreciate how people create and interpret messages in a given culture if they are to adapt their public relations messages to that culture. For example, the collectivist perspective found in Eastern cultures can affect the type or motivational appeals and compliance gaining strategies used in a message. Doing something for the group or for the good of the group becomes more important than doing something for one's self (Adler, 1991).

The internationalization of public relations is undeniable and unlikely to stop (Botan, 1992). Improving communication technology and increasing international business are going to continue thus so too will the need for international public relations (Epley, 1992; Grunig, 1992). The challenge to public relations researchers is to generate the theories and principles needed to guide this burgeoning field. This review of public relations articles

demonstrates that American researchers have yet to meet the demands for this guidance. Hopefully the recommendation offered in this paper will stimulate efforts designed to close the gap between research and practice in international public relations.

Endnotes

[1]The study did not include convention papers or articles form the International Public Relations Journal. Practitioners are unlikely to see convention papers and the brief paper descriptions provided in convention programs would be difficult to code. A study of convention papers might be useful if the data could be obtained. The International Public Relations Review also provides limited access to practitioners. A study of what this journal provides to international public relations warrants further attention. Examining the nationality of the authors would indicate which country is at the forefront of international public relations research. However, these ideas did not fall under the purview of this study.

[2]The Winter 1994 issue of Journalism Quarterly was not included in the study because it was not available at the time of the analysis.

[3]The table of contents was examined in case a public relations article was overlooked by people creating the yearly indexes. Two articles were found in the table of content searches that did not appear in a yearly index.

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Table 1:
Direct Foreign Investment

YEAR	U.S. DIRECT INVESTMENT ABROAD	DIRECT FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN THE U.S.
1982	207,752	124,677
1983	207,203	137,061
1984	211,480	164,583
1985	230,250	184,615
1986	259,800	220,414
1987	314,307	263,394
1988	335,781	314,754
1989	381,781	368,924
1990	426,958	394,911
1991	460,955	414,358
1992	486,670	419,526

The numbers represent millions of dollars.
Source: Survey of Current Business, June, 1993, p. 49.

Table 2:
Articles Published by Journal

PUBLICATION	CODING CLASSIFICATION						
	DOMESTIC	INTERNATIONAL	CULTURAL	NON-CULTURAL	CROSS-CULTURAL U	C	I
PUBLIC RELATIONS REVIEW							
Regular Articles	262	27	16	273	5	8	1
Research in Brief	77	5	6	76	1	4	0
Total	339	32	22	349	6	12	1
JOURNALISM QUARTERLY	27	3	1	29	1	0	0
JOURNAL OF PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH	56	3	2	57	1	0	0
TOTALS	422	38	25	435	8	12	1
	91.3%	8.3%	5.4%	94.6%	1.7%	2.6%	.2%

TOTAL ARTICLES EXAMINED = 460

Table 3:
Summary of International, cultural, and Cross-Cultural Articles

TYPE OF ARTICLE	SUBCATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
INTERNATIONAL ARTICLES			
	Cultural	21	55.3%
	Geographic only	17	44.7%
TOTAL = 38			
CULTURAL ARTICLES			
	International	21	84%
	Cultural only	4	16%
TOTAL = 25			
CROSS-CULTURAL			
	Unicultural	8	38.1%
	Comparative	12	57.1%
	Interactive	1	4.8%
TOTAL = 21			

Table 4:
Articles Published by Year

YEAR	CODING CLASSIFICATION				
	INTERNATIONAL	CULTURAL	CROSS-CULTURAL		
			Unicultural	Comparative	Interactive
1983	1 (2.6%)	1 (2.6%)	0	0	0
1984	2 (4.1%)	2 (4.1%)	1 (2.0%)	1 (2.1%)	0
1985	5 (13.2%)	3 (7.9%)	0	0	0
1986	2 (3.9%)	1 (2.9%)	1 (2.9%)	0	0
1987	3 (6.1%)	2 (2.0%)	0	1 (2.0%)	0
1988	2 (8.0%)	1 (4.0%)	0	1 (4.0%)	0
1989	2 (4.1%)	0	0	0	0
1990	2 (4.4%)	3 (6.7%)	2 (4.4%)	0	0
1991	2 (4.8%)	2 (4.8%)	1 (2.4%)	1 (2.4%)	0
1992	13 (24.1%)	9 (16.7%)	3 (7.3%)	5 (12.2%)	1 (2.4%)
1993	5 (13.5%)	2 (5.4%)	0	1 (2.7%)	0
TOTAL	38 (8.3%)	25 (5.9%)	8 (1.7%)	12 (2.6%)	1 (.2%)

TOTAL ARTICLES EXAMINED = 460